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SUBJECT: THE POPE'S MEGAPHONE: A SURVEY OF HOLY SEE MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Media coverage of the Holy See is as global as the Catholic Church itself. The international dimension of the Holy See's own communication efforts, as well as that of the media covering it, provides Embassy Vatican with a unique platform to reach linguistically and geographically diverse audiences on issues such as human rights and religious freedom. Vatican-affiliated media such as Vatican Radio carry the Pope's message in over 40 languages to a global audience of more than a billion Catholics. Additionally, a wide range of Italian and international media cover the Holy See, from Catholic focused publications - often with global reach - to large Italian dailies and Rome-based correspondents for outlets such as the NY Times and the BBC.

¶2. (U) This survey begins by examining the Holy See's understanding of the role of communications in modern society as well as its own efforts to bring the Pope's message to the world. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications, led by Archbishop Celli, considers the nature and use of communications while also handling practical matters such as audio-visual accreditations. The Holy See's own communication efforts are led by the Holy See Press Office and its head, Father Federico Lombardi, who serves as the official spokesperson. Vatican Radio and the Vatican Television Center are also under his leadership and together reach the world through original programming and retransmission of Papal events. The printed word is the domain of L'Osservatore Romano, the long-standing, official newspaper of the Holy See. These efforts are supported by the work of other entities such as Agenzia Fides, the news agency of the Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

¶3. The Holy See is covered, in turn, by a wide range of Italian and international media. Catholic-oriented publications are at the forefront of such coverage and include Italian publications such as Avvenire and Famiglia Cristiana, wire services like Catholic News Service and ZENIT, and audiovisual media like the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) and Rome Reports. Frequent coverage is also found in the pages of major Italian dailies like La Repubblica and Corriere delle Sera and, on a more episodic basis, in international publications like the International Herald Tribune.

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATIONS

14. (U) The Pontifical Council for Social Communications is led by Archbishop Celli (and was formerly led by now-Cardinal Foley of Philadelphia) and has as its concern the content, nature, and means of communication amongst people. In essence, its mission is two-fold: (1) to support the Church in its communication efforts and (2) to encourage the proper use of the means of communication. These efforts find concrete expression in annual Papal messages on World Communications Day and in interventions in fora such as the U.N. World Summit on Information Society. The Council is also responsible for handling requests for audiovisual accreditation and for Italian and other foreign television coverage related to special events and seasonal ceremonies like Easter and Christmas.

...AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

15. (U) Vatican Radio is the Vatican's semi-official radio station. Founded in 1931, and managed by the Society of Jesus, the station broadcasts around the world in 45 languages via FM, medium wave, short wave, satellite, and the Internet. Its programming is further rebroadcast by some 1000 local Catholic radio stations. Vatican Radio does not track its audience size, but estimates place the number of listeners well into the millions. With a primary mission of communicating Papal events and activities to the world, it also reports on social,

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political, economic, and cultural news of the day. Vatican Radio also records every public word uttered by the Pope, and its 13,000 hours of papal sound archives stretch back to the first broadcast made by Pope Pius XI in 1931.

16. (U) The Vatican Television Center is the Vatican's official television operation, and is located inside Vatican City. It is not maintained as a broadcasting station, but rather as a television production center, capable of getting and providing images of the Pope and of the Vatican, and furnishing them to interested television channels, whether public or private, Catholic or secular. These rebroadcast rights are provided at market rates for large media outlets, like RAI or CNN, but at nominal or no charge for local or Catholic broadcasters. These fees allow the Vatican Television Center to make a small annual profit.

17. (U) L'Osservatore Romano is the Vatican's official daily newspaper. Published daily in Italian it is available in a number of other languages on a weekly basis (including English, Spanish, French, and the South Indian language Malayam). While its circulation numbers are low, the paper remains the most authoritative and comprehensive source for papal writings and activities. It also offers regular news coverage of national and international stories. With a new editor in place since 2007, L'Osservatore Romano has embarked on a program to increase circulation, reduce costs, and overhaul its image (with the most obvious sign being the use of color pictures on the front page).

18. (U) Agenzia Fides (faith), founded in 1927, is not only the official news agency of the Pontifical Mission Society for the

Propagation of the Faith but also the on-line semi-official news agency of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Agenzia Fides was created to disseminate news fostering Roman Catholic missionary cooperation, spiritual communion, and material support. This international news agency has operated for 70 years, providing news, photos, and reports of contemporary Roman Catholic mission conditions throughout the world. The print and e-mail versions are available in English, French, Italian, Spanish, German, and Chinese. It has become a highly-respected source of news on the developing world.

COVERING THE HOLY SEE...HOME AND ABROAD

¶9. (U) Avvenire and Famiglia Cristiana are the foremost Catholic-oriented publications in Italy. A daily newspaper, Avvenire is published in Milan and jointly owned by the Italian Bishops' Conference and several private Catholic entrepreneurs. It has a national circulation of approximately 150,000. Famiglia Cristiana is a weekly magazine "of Catholic inspiration" that has a national circulation of more than a million. Milan-based, the weekly is owned by the Societa San Paolo Gruppo Periodici which is Italy's leading Catholic publisher. In addition, large publications like the weekly magazines Panorama and L'Espresso, as well as newspapers like Corriere delle Sera and La Repubblica, have veteran, respected journalists on the Vatican beat who produce a steady stream of stories

¶10. (U) Catholic News Service and ZENIT are perfect illustrations of the global reach of the Catholic-oriented media covering the Holy See. Catholic News Service was founded in 1920 as a news service specializing in reporting on religion, and serves as the primary source of news appearing in more than 170 Catholic news outlets in the US and 70 outlets in more than 60 other countries. An estimated eight million people worldwide either directly or indirectly receive their news from Catholic News Service. Zenit has a similarly broad reach, serving as an on-line newswire service reporting Vatican and international Church news. Approximately 450,000 private subscribers receive ZENIT's daily news service via email in one of seven languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Arabic). ZENIT further estimates that some 20,000 communication outlets worldwide publish ZENIT pieces, including radio stations and diocesan and parish bulletins.

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¶11. (U) Television coverage of the Holy See is the newest area of media expansion, with increased demand solidifying established networks and bringing new ones into the mix. EWTN and Rome Reports illustrate both ends of the spectrum. EWTN is the pre-eminent Catholic network today. Started in 1981, it has since grown exponentially, and presently claims a broadcast reach of 148 million homes in 140 countries. It transmits programming 24 hours a day in both English and Spanish. Rome Reports is one of several new companies that have arisen to serve the burgeoning demand for Vatican news, especially in the Spanish-speaking world. It produces daily and weekly news segments, and also longer documentaries on topics such as the Church in China. These pieces are then sold to television companies around the world, including EWTN.

AND ON THE WEB

¶12. (U) The internet is emerging as a powerful means for the Holy See to communicate with the world. Although most Vatican entities have not fully embraced the new technology, some, such as Vatican Radio, have recognized the internet's potential in reaching global audiences. Vatican Radio's website (www.vaticanradio.org) is in 38 languages. In addition to mainstream media, a growing community of bloggers offers commentary and analysis on the Holy See. The blog Whispers in the Loggia is a prominent example.

COMMENT: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ENGAGEMENT

¶13. (SBU) As this survey indicates, the Holy See both communicates to, and is covered by, the world. The Holy See's own communications efforts win praise from observers. "Proactive, not reactive," is how one long-standing journalist described media operations under Fr. Lombardi (an observation given credence by the Pope's handling of the sex abuse scandal during his trip to the United States). Fr. Lombardi's simultaneous appointment as head of the Holy See Press Office, Vatican Radio, and VTC has also brought greater coordination to the Holy See's communication efforts. Recent efforts to revive L'Osservatore Romano underscore the importance placed on communication by the Holy See.

¶14. (SBU) The breadth of media coverage of the Holy See provides U.S. policymakers with rich opportunities to speak to the world on issues such as human rights, religious freedom, humanitarian assistance, and development. Although this unique media environment has limitations - for instance, Vatican-affiliated media are often reluctant to run USG op-eds - it can serve as a valuable platform through which to reach global audiences.

GLENDON